

Calvin's Development of the Marks of the Church in *The Institutes* and His Legacy of Confessional Influence¹

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With the shadows of medieval history and the Church of Rome looming large, the European Reformers needed to clarify what constituted a true church. For the leaders who had first sought reform within the Roman Catholic Church, but then were forced to bring it from without, what were their views? How did their definition of the church differ from the Catholic Church? How did their understanding of the church impact their life and ministry? As the Reformation progressed, how was the visible church defined in the development of the Protestant confessions? These questions are perhaps best answered in seeing the development of John's Calvin's doctrine of the church and his influence as captured in the Reformation confessions.

Yet before exploring Calvin, it is important to examine first the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on the constitution of the church as a backdrop. By reviewing the Council of Trent's counter-statements to the Protestant Reformation (particularly as seen in the catechism that came forth from Trent), Rome's official teachings regarding the church can be understood and their view of the church's identity established.² Calvin's work and legacy regarding the constitution of the church are then more readily recognized.

The Roman Catholic Church's Views on the Marks

In the medieval period, a developing belief solidified in Rome over what constituted the true church and what were its necessary characteristics. By the thirteenth century, "The Fourth Lateran Council declared that: "There is one universal Church of unassailable "attributes.""³ These attributes were four in number, as the Roman Catholic Church relied on the Nicene Creed statement, which declares, "We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church." In the early decades of the Reformation, Rome struggled for a period with limiting itself to these four qualities.

In the 16th century the fertile imagination of the Roman apologists distinguished a varied number of "*notae ecclesiae*"; seven, then ten, then fifteen, and one apologist (Bozio, in 1591) even went so far as to enumerate a hundred! But very soon, and

¹ This article originally appeared in *Advancing the Vision: Essays in Honor of John, H. White*. eds. Bruce Backensto and Jonathan Watt (Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania: Falls City Press, 2019).

² Though the Council of Trent met in the middle of the sixteenth century and was seen as a response to the Reformation, its teachings espoused the long-held beliefs of the church. Thus, there is little danger of anachronism in looking at Trent's declarations before examining the Reformers.

³ G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1976), 14.

fortunately, the "*notae*" were reduced to the four qualities whereby the Symbol of Nicaea defined the Church: unity, sanctity, catholicity and apostolicity.⁴

Rome's use of these four attributes can be seen most clearly in the catechism that came from the Council of Trent, called by Pope John III in 1545 (and continued until 1563 under the supervision of five popes in total⁵) to counter the growing Protestant Reformation. In "Article IX: I believe in the Holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints," under the section "The Marks of the Church," each of the four attributes above is treated individually and with the claim that all within the church should know these marks. "The distinctive marks of the Church are also to be made known to the faithful, that thus they may be enabled to estimate the extent of the blessing conferred by God on those who have had the happiness to be born and educated within her pale."⁶ With the Council's emphasis on the pope's rule of the church and the claim that the Church of Rome was the ultimate church, these marks as defined by Rome became one of their focal points to create a definition of what truly constitutes the visible church.

To understand how Rome treated the marks, consider the first mark of unity. The Council of Trent stated:

The first mark of the true Church is described in the Nicene Creed, and consists in unity: My dove is one, my beautiful one is one. So vast a multitude, scattered far and wide, is called one for the reasons mentioned by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians: One Lord, one faith, one baptism. The Church has but one ruler and one governor, the invisible one, Christ, whom the eternal Father hath made head over all the Church, which is his body; the visible one, the Pope, who, as legitimate successor of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, fills the Apostolic chair.⁷

In prescribing the pope as the visible ruler over the visible church, the Council was seeking to ensure that other movements, particularly the Reformed and Lutheran camps, were viewed as schismatic, having broken off from the mother church. The Council of Trent believed that it was "the unanimous teaching of the Fathers that this visible head is necessary to establish and preserve unity in the Church," and cited numerous church fathers to support its claim.⁸

Holding forth this first attribute, Trent's teachings then set forth the next marks of holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity as issuing from the oneness of papal authority. In concluding that the Holy Spirit had conferred legitimacy on the Catholic Church through these marks, the catechism states further that "just as this one Church cannot err in faith or morals, since it is guided by the Holy Ghost; so, on the contrary, all other societies arrogating to themselves the name of church, must necessarily, because guided by the spirit of the devil, be sunk in the most pernicious errors, both doctrinal and moral."⁹ Thus, clearly, Rome viewed Protestant congregations as illegitimate based on their definition of the marks.

⁴ Charles Westphal, "The Marks of the Church: A Protestant Viewpoint," *Anglican Theological Review* 42 (1960), 91.

⁵ The five popes were Paul III, Julius III, Marcellus II, Paul IV, and Pius IV.

⁶ J. Donovan, *The Catechism of the Council of Trent* (Chorley, Lancashire, United Kingdom: Christian Books Today Ltd., 2009), 74.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

The Protestant Response to Rome's Marks

Though the Reformers differed from Rome on how the preceding four qualities were manifested in the church, they did not deny that they were legitimate attributes of the church. "It is striking in this connection that the four words themselves were never disputed, since the Reformers did not opt for other 'attributes.'"¹⁰ Second, they disagreed with Rome's view that these attributes were suitable for defining what constitutes a true church compared to a false one. As Berkouwer further points out:

Ultimately, such a static ecclesiology no longer allows room for discussion about the ecclesiastical reality; and to the extent that one is willing to embark on such a discussion, it can have relation only to the Church's periphery, which is separated from her unassailable 'essence.' In contrast, in the Reformation it was precisely the *notae* that took on decisive significance, with the result that it was impossible to use the 'attributes' apologetically as an unthreatened and unassailable, aprioristic reality. The Reformers could not refer simply to the factual reality of the Church: *una, catholica, apostolica, and sancta*. The question of the *notae* reached an apex in various tensions in Church history in connection with the question of the true Church, the *ecclesia vera*.¹¹

Third, as the above quote indicates, part of the unsuitability of the Nicene qualities was a confusion over the need to identify a true, visible church rather than speaking more generally regarding the invisible church. Finally, this dilemma in identifying a proper visible church led the Reformers to make a distinction between the essential marks, or the *notae*, and the more general attributes of the church. As James Bannerman states, "First, there is an important distinction between what is necessary to the being of a Church, and what is necessary to its wellbeing."¹² Defining the church and how to care for her properly was at the heart of the concern of the Reformation leaders, as can be seen particularly in John Calvin.

John Calvin's Development of the Marks

In the fourth book of *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, aptly entitled "The External Means or Aims by Which God Invites Us into the Society of Christ," Calvin makes the careful distinction of what constitutes a church. In this section of *The Institutes*, Calvin discussed the topics of "the church, its government, orders, and power; then the sacraments; and lastly, the civil order."¹³ His commitment to the visible church echoes past theologians, such as Cyprian of Carthage and Augustine:

So powerful is participation in the church it keeps us in the society of God . . . But as it is now our purpose to discourse of the visible Church, let us learn, from her single title of Mother, how useful, nay, how necessary the knowledge of her is, since there is no other means of entering into life unless she conceive us in the womb and give us birth, unless she nourish us at her breasts, and, in short, keep us under her charge and government, until, divested of mortal flesh, we become like the angels (Matt. 22:30).¹⁴

¹⁰ G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: EerdmansCompany, 1976), 14.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* Vol. I (Vestavia Hills, Alabama: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009), 55.

¹³ John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles. (Philadelphia; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 4.1.1.

¹⁴ Ibid., 4.1.1.

Central to the church nurturing the people of God, in Calvin's development, is the preaching of the Word of God. After quoting from Ephesians 4, which cites pastors as Christ's gift to the church, Calvin states, "We see that God, who might perfect his people in a moment, chooses not to bring them to manhood in any other way than by the education of the Church. We see the mode of doing it expressed; the preaching of celestial doctrine is committed to pastors."¹⁵ After tracing this central mark of teaching through the Old Testament into the New Testament, from priests and prophets to apostles and preachers, he defends God's use of human agents in the propagation of his Word.

Those who think that the authority of the doctrine is impaired by the insignificance of the men who are called to teach, betray their ingratitude; for among the many noble endowments with which God has adorned the human race, one of the most remarkable is, that he deigns to consecrate the mouths and tongues of men to his service, making his own voice to be heard in them. Wherefore, let us not on our part decline obediently to embrace the doctrine of salvation, delivered by his command and mouth; because, although the power of God is not confined to external means, he has, however, confined us to his ordinary method of teaching.¹⁶

Calvin testifies both to the Lord's use of ministers and God's claim that all spiritual work belongs to him. He viewed the preaching ministry expansively, as proclamation from the pulpit and to all in need of the gospel, "Christ did not ordain pastors on the principle that they only teach the Church in a general way on the public platform, but that they care for the individual sheep, bring back the wandering and scattered to the fold, bind up the broken and crippled, heal the sick, support the frail and weak."¹⁷

As Calvin continues, he distinguishes between the invisible and visible church, and then denotes how the latter is made evident:

Often, too, by the name of Church is designated the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world, who profess to worship one God and Christ, who by baptism are initiated into the faith; by partaking of the Lord's Supper profess unity in true doctrine and charity, agree in holding the word of the Lord, and observe the ministry which Christ has appointed for the preaching of it.¹⁸

Calvin acknowledges how vital it is for the Lord to have made clear for his people what the church is in order to recognize it. "Accordingly, inasmuch as it was of importance to us to recognize it, the Lord has distinguished it by certain marks, and as it were symbols."¹⁹ He then repeatedly points to the Word and sacraments as the marks of the church.

And, since assurance of faith was not necessary, he substituted for it a certain charitable judgment whereby we recognize as members of the church those who, by confession of faith, by example of life, and by partaking in the sacraments, profess the same God and Christ with us. He has, moreover, set off by plainer marks the knowledge of his very body to us, knowing how necessary it is to our salvation...Wherever we see the Word of God

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.1.3.

¹⁶ Ibid., 4.1.5.

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Acts 14-28: Torrance Edition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 175.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4.1.7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4.1.8.

purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists [cf. Eph. 2:20].²⁰

As such, Calvin warned against the attempts to remove these two marks. "For there is nothing that Satan plots more than to remove and do away with one or both of these. Sometimes he tries by effacing and destroying these marks to remove the true and genuine distinction of the church."²¹

In pointing out the word and sacraments only as the two distinguishing traits, Calvin appears to depart somewhat from Martin Bucer, his mentor during his Geneva exile in Strasbourg from 1538-41, who included the third mark of discipline.

At Geneva, Calvin himself did not include discipline as a mark of the Church, but the tension between the objectivity of grace and the subjective response to that grace raised questions as to the validity of the definition. Significantly, the later Reformed confessions were to follow Bucer's lead and to include discipline *sub regno Christi* as a third mark."²²

However, a closer reading of *The Institutes* and other of Calvin's writings gives needed clarification to this assessment.

Calvin saw the preaching of the truths of God's Word as the chief and ultimate mark. As such, he often made statements in discussing the marks that could seem to invalidate the other ones. "Let it, therefore, be a fixed point, that a holy unity exists amongst us, when consenting in pure doctrine, we are united in Christ alone."²³ He warned against trusting in outer signs or symbols of God's kingdom with this belief in view.

Therefore, although they put forward Temple, priesthood, and the rest of the outward shows, this empty glitter which blinds the eyes of the simple ought not to move us a whit to grant that the church exists where God's Word is not found. For this is the abiding mark with which our Lord has sealed his own: 'Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice' [John 18:37].²⁴

For another example, in the "Articles of the Faculty of Paris," Calvin stated, "We all confess that there has been a universal Church ever since the beginning of the world and that it must continue until the end. The question is, what are the outward signs by which we can discern it? In our conviction, it is the Word of God, which is the mark of the Church."²⁵ Thus, based on a limited sample of statements such as these, a similar charge could be made of Calvin not including discipline, namely, that Calvin did not view the sacraments as a mark, which is clearly untrue. Herman Bavinck, commenting on the Reformers' practice of identifying preaching as the chief mark, states that "a true church has only one mark, the Word," yet he goes on to add that

²⁰ Ibid., 4.1.9.

²¹ Ibid., 4.1.11.

²² Westphal, "The Marks," 91.

²³ John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, (Dallas, Texas: Protestant Heritage Press, 1995), 129.

²⁴ Calvin, *Instit.*, 4.2.6.

²⁵ Westphal, "The Marks", 91.

the Word is "variously administered and confessed in the church's preaching, sacraments, discipline, and life."²⁶

Next, the marks were viewed as ranked and interdependent on one another, with preaching, as indicated above, viewed as chief, followed by the sacraments, yet with both needing the support of discipline to maintain their integrity.²⁷ One can hear the need for discipline to accompany the preaching and administration of the sacraments in statements such as the following ones from *The Institutes* (emphasis added):

We have laid down as distinguishing marks of the church the preaching of the Word and the observance of the sacraments. These can never exist *without bringing forth fruit* and prospering by God's blessing...and *no one is permitted to spurn its authority, flout its warnings, resist its counsels, or make light of its chastisements* - much less to desert it and break its unity.²⁸

For in it alone is kept safe and uncorrupted that doctrine in which *piety stands sound* and the use of the sacraments ordained by the Lord *is guarded* . . . we are neither to renounce the communion of the church nor, remaining in it, to disturb its peace and *duly ordered discipline*.²⁹

Third, Calvin makes it clear that a holy lifestyle must accompany faith in the Word of God and the practice of the sacraments. "If churches are well ordered, they will not bear the wicked in their bosom. Nor will they indiscriminately admit worthy and unworthy together to that sacred banquet."³⁰ In his letter to Cardinal Sadoletto, Calvin decried the cardinal's attempt to draw the Genevan Protestants back into Rome's fold. In so doing, he faults Sadoletto's definition of the church, which consists primarily of appeals to unity and catholicity, asking, "[W]hat comes of the Word of the Lord, that clearest of all marks?"³¹ Then, as he proceeds, Calvin writes that there are "three things on which the safety of the Church is founded, viz., doctrine, discipline, and the sacraments . . ." ³² Clearly, Calvin upheld discipline as necessary.

Later in the twelfth chapter in Book 4 of *The Institutes*, Calvin treats more formally the subject of discipline by starting with its necessity. "But because some persons, in their hatred of discipline, recoil from its very name, let them understand this: if no society, indeed, no house which has even a small family, can be kept in proper condition without discipline, it is much more necessary in the church."³³ He then encourages those in the church to be open to receiving correction from others.

²⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*. Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 312.

²⁷ Even today a pastor may be deemed a "minister of the Word and sacraments." This title does not necessarily imply that he does not practice discipline or view it as a mark of his ministry.

²⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.1.12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.1.15.

³¹ John Calvin, *John Calvin, Tracts and Letters*, Vol. 1, Trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 35.

³² Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, 38. Note here Calvin goes on in this sentence to speak of ceremonies as a fourth "mark," but his meaning is that the Church of Rome has added this in a way contrary to God's Word.

³³ *Ibid.*, 4.12.1.

The first foundation of discipline is to provide a place for private admonition; that is, if anyone does not perform his duty willingly, or behaves insolently, or does not live honorably, or has committed any act deserving blame – he should allow himself to be admonished; and when the situation demands it, every man should endeavor to admonish his brother.³⁴

Calvin further treats the common text on this subject, Matthew 18:15-20, by giving direction on how to handle private and public sins, and lists the sins that could lead to exclusion from the fellowship.

As he offers three purposes for discipline, Calvin demonstrates the interplay between the marks. He states that the first purpose is for separating the righteous from the wicked, “that they who lead a filthy and infamous life may not be called Christians, to the dishonor of God, as if his holy church [cf. Eph. 5:25-26] were a conspiracy of wicked and abandoned men.”³⁵ According to him, this separation preserves the order and sanctity of the Lord’s Supper. The next rationale he offers for discipline is that it preserves purity in the church. “The second purpose is that the good be not corrupted by the constant company of the wicked, as commonly happens.”³⁶ He then follows this with discipline’s restorative purpose. “The third purpose is that those overcome by shame for their baseness begin to repent.”³⁷

Given Calvin’s reputation as being severe, his pastoral heart should be noted particularly with respect to the subject of discipline. He advises great patience in applying formal discipline, saying that official acts should not take place “until the sinner becomes obstinate.”³⁸ Even then, the discipline is to be done in a spirit of gentleness, and speaks of the cruelty of ancient church practices where undue lengthy judgments would have created despair. He instead stresses that love should be seen in disciplinary measures: “This gentleness is required in the whole body of the church, that it should deal mildly with the lapsed and should not punish with extreme rigor, but rather, according to Paul’s injunction, confirm its love toward them [2 Cor. 2:8].”³⁹ Even those who are to be excommunicated “are not cast into everlasting ruin and damnation” as was practiced by Rome, but are warned with a hope that “in hearing that their life and morals are condemned, they are assured of their everlasting condemnation unless they repent.”⁴⁰

Calvin believed the marks were placed into the hands of ordained leadership to administer. Back in the third chapter of Book 4, “The Doctors and Ministers of the Church, Their Election, and Office,” Calvin lays out the Biblical case for the church’s governance. Using Ephesians 4:4-16, he goes through the five offices listed there, showing the first three (apostles, prophets, and evangelists) were of the apostolic age and are no longer functioning. He explains that in the New Testament, titles such as pastor, teacher, elder, and overseer, are used interchangeably. He discusses how the calling to this office involves both the internal call, as a man senses the Spirit’s stirring him to this responsibility, and the external calling, which comes from the church as it observes certain men having the sound doctrine and holy lives requisite for this position. Thus,

³⁴ Ibid., 4.12.2.

³⁵ Ibid., 4.12.5.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 4.12.6.

³⁹ Ibid., 4.12.7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.12.8.

ministers who have this calling are to be set apart by the church, such as was done in Acts 13. Calvin supports the concept of the elders being elected by the church, based on Acts 14:23 and its use of χειροτονεω in the choice of elders, used to describe the action of the Greek polis in “electing by a show of hands.” He completes this section by discussing ordination and how it is accomplished by the laying on of hands. Clearly, ordination in the Protestant churches granted the leadership authority to oversee the marks and was distinct from the Catholic view of apostolic succession and papal-granted authority.

The Confessional Legacy of Calvin Regarding the Marks

The varied confessions from the nations where the Reformation was birthed and spread attest to the impact that Calvin had on the church’s identity. Certainly, not all the confessions relied solely upon him. Yet, a good number of the confessions were greatly influenced by Calvin and testified to the necessity of the marks.⁴¹

The *Geneva Confession* of 1536, written for the Swiss church by John Calvin and William Farel, declares, “The proper mark by which to rightly discern the church of Jesus Christ is that his holy gospel be purely and faithfully preached, proclaimed, heard, and kept, and his sacraments be properly administered, even if there be some imperfections and faults, as there always will be among men.”⁴² This document testifies to the place of ministers in the ministry of the Word and sacraments, and to keeping due order in the church with the positive side of discipline. “To these, we accord no other power or authority but to conduct, rule, and govern the people of God committed to them by the same Word, in which they have the power to command, defend, promise, and warn, and without which they neither can nor ought to attempt anything.”⁴³

The *French Confession* (1559), in which Calvin played a central role, stresses the importance of preaching in no uncertain terms: “We detest all visionaries who would like, so far as lies in their power, to destroy this ministry and preaching of the Word and sacraments.”⁴⁴ The Gallic confession goes on to say that “. . . [W]e believe it is important to discern with care and prudence which is the true church, for this title has been much abused. We say, then, according to the Word of God, that it is the company of the faithful who agree to follow His Word and the pure religion which it teaches . . . ”⁴⁵ However, in citing the first two of the marks directly, the confession does not leave out the third, for it insists that the church are those “who agree to follow the Word and...who advance in it all their lives, growing and becoming more confirmed in the fear of God according as they feel the want of growing and pressing onward.”⁴⁶

The *Scottish Confession of Faith* (1560) was drawn up by John Knox, who spent several years with Calvin at Geneva prior to writing it. In “Article 18: Of the Notes, by Which the True Church Is Discerned from the False; and Who Shall Be Judge of the Doctrine,” an emerging clarity is seen in adding the third mark of discipline to the description of what constitutes a true church.

⁴¹ I am indebted to the insights of Robert Reymond for much of the following. See Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, Second Ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 855-859.

⁴² Arthur Cochrane, ed. *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 125.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Robert Letham, “The Necessity of Preaching in the Modern World,” *Ordained Servant: A Journal for Church Officers* 22 (2013), 43.

⁴⁵ Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:375.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The notes, therefore, of the true Church of God, we believe, confess, and avow to be, first, the true preaching of the word of God, in the which God hath revealed himself unto us, as the writings of the Prophets and Apostles do declare: secondly, the right administration of the Sacraments of Christ Jesus, which must be annexed unto the word and promise of God, to seal and confirm the same in our hearts: lastly, Ecclesiastical discipline, uprightly ministered, as God's word prescribeth, whereby vice is repressed, and virtue nourished.⁴⁷

However, perhaps Calvin's influence in viewing the first two marks as prominent is seen in the sentence that follows. "Wheresoever, then, these former notes are seen and of any time continue, (be the number never so few, about two or three), there, without all doubt, is the true Church of Christ; who, according to his promise, is in the midst of them . . ." ⁴⁸

The following year saw Guido de Brés of the Netherlands, influenced greatly by Calvin's teachings and the *Gallic Confession*, publish the *Belgic Confession* (1561). With great clarity, the three marks are emphasized in Article XXIX "Of the Marks of the True Church, and Wherein She Differs from the False Church." "The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein, if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure word of God."⁴⁹ This section also indicates how individual Christians are to be discerned, giving special notice that the mark by which they are known in addition to faith is that "they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof."⁵⁰ Increasingly, the confessions emphasize that accompanying the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments is the behavior of the members of the church to live a holy, disciplined life.

The influence of Calvin, flowing down in history through these preceding confessions, is seen in what is called the "crown jewel" of the Reformed confessions. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1643) testifies to the marks of the church as well. Beginning by defining the visible church, the importance of the gospel and its truths (a clear reference to the first mark) are highlighted.

The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law) consists of all those, throughout the world, that profess the true religion...and particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.⁵¹

In the following paragraph, the confession expands to the need for ordained ministers and the other marks with these words (explanations inserted).

Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry (preachers of the Word), oracles (the holy Scriptures), and ordinances of God (the sacraments and the

⁴⁷ John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland: With Which Are Included Knox's Confession and The Book of Discipline*, ed. by Cuthbert Lennox (London: Andrew Melrose, 1905), 354.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹ Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:419-20.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 3:420.

⁵¹ WCF 25.2.

accompanying commitment to them reflected in discipline), for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto.⁵²

These confessions, recorded over a century of time, continue to direct the greater Reformed community throughout the world down into our modern era. Thus, paying close attention to Calvin's teaching and influence regarding the true constitution of the visible church should remain a high priority to those holding to these confessions.

⁵² WCF 25.3